JUNE 30 1951

Jaunts WITH JAMIE

More About The Hams What Am

MILWAUKEE HAMS, as those over the state and the nation, have come a long way since, inspired by Marconi in 1903, they first began to tinker with coils, wet batteries and those mysterious short waves which now girdle the earth.

I remember an old friend, Charlie Keep, who made my first cat's whisker receiving set. He was one of the original hams. His basement, with its mess of Mason jar batteries, haywire, and coils made of copper wire wound around those cylindrical oatmeal cartons and cardboard mailing tubes, had the awesome appearance of Dr. Jekyll's laboratory of death.

But gone are those outmoded, fearsome stations with their "rock-crusher" transmitters. Today the radio amateur's "shack" is as modern as tomorrow. That's no exaggeration, for electronic experts declare that much, if not most, of today's radio perfection is the result of the experiments of yesterday's amateur. Likewise, many of tomorrow's improvements will be the result of today's amateur's experiments.

It was a radio "amateur," a ham, who first bounced radar impulses, signals, or whatever you call them off the moon.

The Army, Navy, Air Force, Red Cross, Civil Defense, etc., etc., have come to depend upon the scientific skill of the amateur radio enthusiast.

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JUST LAST WEEK an amateur "Field Day" was held here in Milwaukee. The hams went out with low-powered equipment — the sort of sending and receiving sets that can be made out of "what have you," should our commercial communications be knocked out in a national catastrophe.

The amateurs already have demonstrated their resourcefulness and ingenuity in affording means of communications in scores of national disasters — floods, explosions, forest fires, etc., etc.

Their value to the nation dates back to World War I when the government asked the American Radio Relay League (the hams' national organization) if it could supply 500 radio operators within 10 days.

The appeal was broadcast over the amateur networks and within the prescribed time the government had its 500 operators. Before the war ended, more than 4,000 amateurs were in the service of their country. That number increased to 25,000 in the second World War.

It was an amateur who opened the eyes of the Navy, to short wave possibilities. In 1924 this ham, a civilian, joined the Pacific Fleet on its maneuvers throughout the Orient.

When he came aboard with his entire equipment contained in two large suitcases he was ridiculed and laughed at by the radio staff. They called his gear "pin boxes." But the laugh was on the "professionals" when, with his short wave pin boxes, he was able to contact directly the Relay Headquarters at Hartford, Conn., 4,000 miles away. The best the Navy could do at that time with several tons of 8,000-watt transmitters, under most favorable conditions, was 1,600 miles.

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SMALL WONDER that this enthusiastic group of American amateurs now numbers more than 90,000, twice that of the hams in the rest of the world. They are a great fraternity in every sense of the word.

The government licenses their stations without cost. The hams vigilantly police themselves to see that they comply with government regulations — that their stations do not interfere with commercial broadcasting, that they make no charge for the message they send, that they broadcast no propaganda, political information or news, that they use no profanity, etc.

After World War II, hams set up stations in former theaters of war to transmit messages between relatives and homesick boys and to assist in locating lost GIs.

Jackie E. Toppe, 4901 S. 30th St., W 9 AYX, one of Milwaukee's few women amateurs, is widely known for relaying messages between soldiers in Korea and their families. She has "worked" (talked with) stations in more than 100 different countries.

Incidentally, Mrs. Toppe talks with the operator at an amateur station in the Pentagon Bldg., one of the last places in the world you'd expect to find an "amateur" station.

(We'll conclude our story of hams tomorrow.)